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UNITED NATIONS POPULATION FUND
PROPOSED PROJECTS AND PROGRAMMES

Recommendation by the Executive Director
Assistance to the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic

Proposed UNFPA assistance: $6.0 million, $5.2 million from regular resources and $800,000 from multi-bilateral and/or other, including regular, resources

Programme period: 4 years (1997-2000)

Cycle of assistance: Second

Category per decision 96/15: A

Proposed assistance by core programme areas (in millions of $):

	Regular resources	Other	*Total*
Reproductive health	3.5	.8	4.3
Population & development strategies	1.0	-	1.0
Advocacy	.7	-	.7
Total	5.2	.8	6.0

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96-37909 (E)

LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

INDICATORS RELATED TO ICPD GOALS*

		Thresholds*
Births attended by health professional (%)[1]	20.0	≥60
Contraceptive prevalence rate (15-44) (%)[2]	9.0	≥55
Access to basic health services (%)[3]	67.0	≥60
Infant mortality rate (/1000)[4]	97.0	≤50
Maternal mortality rate (/100,000)[5]	300.0	≤100
Gross female enrolment rate at primary level (%)[6]	64.0	≥75
Adult female literacy rate(%)[7]	40.9	≥50

*** AS CONTAINED IN DOCUMENT DP/FPA/1996/15 AND APPROVED BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD IN DECISION 96/15.**

[1] *WHO, Coverage of Maternal Care, 3rd ed., 1993. Data cover the period 1983-1993.*

[2] *United Nations Population Division, World Contraceptive Use 1994, ST/ESA/SER.A/143. Data cover the period 1986-1993.*

[3] *UNICEF, The State of the World's Children, 1995. Data cover the period 1985-1993.*

[4] *United Nations Population Division, World Population Prospects Database 1950-2050, 1994 Revision. Data are for 1992.*

[5] *UNICEF, The State of the World's Children 1995, which is based on data compiled by WHO. Data cover the period 1980-1992.*

[6] *United Nations Statistical Division, Women's Indicators and Statistics Database, Version 3 (CD-ROM), 1994, which is based on data compiled by UNESCO.*

[7] *UNESCO, Education for All - Status and Trends, 1994.*

Demographic Facts

Population (000) in 1995	4,882	Annual population growth rate (%)	2.8
Population in year 2000 (000)	5,602	Urban	5.7
Sex ratio (/100 females)	97.2	Rural	1.9
Per cent urban	21.7	Crude birth rate (/1000)	40.6
Age distribution (%)		Crude death rate (/1000)	13.2
Ages 0-14	44.8	Net migration rate (/1000)	0.0
Youth (15-24)	18.2	Total fertility rate (woman)	6.03
Ages 60+	4.8	Life expectancy at birth (years)	
Percentage of women aged 15-49	45.1	Males	52.0
Median age (years)	17.6	Females	55.0
Population density (/sq. km.)	21	Both sexes	53.5
		GNP per capita (U.S. dollars, 1994)	320

Sources: Data are from the Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis (DESIPA) of the United Nations, World Population Prospects: the 1994 Revision; Annual population growth, including urban and rural data are from DESIPA, World Urbanization Prospects: the 1994 Revision. GNP per capita is from UNDP. Two dashes (--) indicate that data are not available.

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1. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) proposes to support a population programme over the four-year period 1997-2000 to assist the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic in achieving its population and development objectives. UNFPA proposes to fund the programme in the amount of $6 million, of which $5.2 million would be programmed from UNFPA's regular resources to the extent such resources are available. UNFPA would seek to provide the balance of $800,000 from multi-bilateral and/or other, including regular, resources to the extent possible, consistent with Executive Board decision 96/15 on the allocation of UNFPA resources. This would be the Fund's second programme of assistance to the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

2. The proposed programme has been developed in close collaboration with national authorities, non-governmental organization (NGOs) and the donor community. The programme takes into account the Lao People's Democratic Republic's Five-Year Socio-Economic Development Plan for 1996-2000, other policy statements of the Government and the Country Strategy Note (CSN) for 1996-2000 agreed upon between the Government and the United Nations system. It is based on the findings and recommendations of the multisectoral programme review and strategy development (PRSD) exercise that was undertaken in August 1996. The proposed programme cycle is in harmony with that of the country's five-year development plan and is synchronized with the programme cycle of the sixth UNDP country programme (1997-2000).

3. Under the proposed programme, UNFPA will assist the Government in human resource training and institutional building in order to increase the national capacity to implement quality reproductive health services in a total of 103 districts out of 133 districts. The programme will also assist the Government in strengthening its capacity to formulate a national population policy and integrating it into national development plans and will support efforts in reducing social disparities on the basis of gender and ethnic group.

4. All activities under the proposed programme, as in all UNFPA-assisted activities, will be undertaken in accordance with the principles and objectives of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), which was endorsed by the General Assembly through its resolution 49/128.

Background

5. Human welfare indicators for the Lao People's Democratic Republic are among the lowest in the subregion. The country is classified in category "A" according to UNFPA's new approach for resource allocation. Average life expectancy is 53 years. Lao children average less than three years of schooling (males 3.6 years, females 2.1 years). Over one-third of adults are illiterate -- 35 per cent of men and 41 per cent of women. One-half to three-quarters of the people have no access to sanitation or safe drinking water. The annual per capita gross national product (GNP) is only $320.

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6. According to United Nations estimates, the population of the Lao People's Democratic Republic was 4.9 million in 1995, growing at a rate of 2.8 per cent a year. The country's Five-Year Socio-Economic Development Plan (1996-2000) aims at maintaining the population growth rate at 2.4 per cent. The crude birth rate, crude death rate, infant and maternal mortality rates remain well above the average for other Southeast Asian countries. The desired number of children is 4.2, but the total fertility rate is considerably higher (6.03), indicating a large unmet demand for family planning services. The Lao People's Democratic Republic's population structure has a very broad base with about 45 per cent aged less than 15 years. The nation's population is expected to double within 27 years.

7. In the Lao People's Democratic Republic, poverty has many faces, geographically, ethnically and in terms of gender. The prevalence of poverty adversely affects people's abilities to fulfill their basic needs in the fields of health and education. In rural areas, about 70 per cent of people do not have access to health services within 3 kilometres. In urban areas, most people do have access to nearby health facilities, but only about 22 per cent of Laotians live in towns or cities. Only 20 per cent of all deliveries are attended by medical personnel. All other deliveries are performed by traditional birth attendants (TBAs), family members and relatives.

8. The results of a 1995 fertility and birth-spacing survey show that 41 per cent of currently married women stated that they would like to curtail childbearing, and 23 per cent stated that they would like to lengthen their birth intervals in order to plan their families according to their household income. Contraceptive use is very low in the Lao People's Democratic Republic: only 9 per cent of currently married women aged 15-49 use a contraceptive method. There are regional, rural/urban and socio-economic disparities in birth-spacing practices. Birth spacing is highest in the central region, which is more prosperous than the southern and mountainous regions, where it is very low. Birth spacing is also less practiced among the uneducated and among women involved in agriculture.

Previous UNFPA assistance

9. Early activities supported by UNFPA included support for census activities between 1972 and 1976; support for establishing a system of demographic and statistical data collection during 1980-1982; assistance to the 1985 population census; and support for maternal and child health services and birth spacing in two clinics of Vientiane. Although this assistance provided much needed population data, the utilization and dissemination of the data for policy formulation and development planning was lacking. A further weakness in the quality of data was the failure to disaggregate the information by gender.

10. The first country programme (1993-1996) was funded in the amount of $3.5 million for a birth-spacing programme, the integration of population factors into development planning, and population education. UNFPA provided support to birth-spacing services in selected districts in 13

provinces, equipped three training centres for maternal and child health staff, and trained about 3,800 Lao Women's Union village volunteers. UNFPA assistance for training for the birth-spacing programme and for the population field contributed to national capacity-building and the strengthening of national institutions. A knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) survey funded by UNFPA provided the first national representative data on contraceptive prevalence, knowledge and sources of supplies.

11. Several important lessons were drawn from the first country programme. Firstly, supporting birth-spacing activities was a positive approach in the context of gaining national support and recognition for population concerns. It also facilitated the development of an infrastructure to provide reproductive health services. Secondly, the phased expansion of the programme ensured that resources were utilized efficiently while gradually developing capacity at the district level, thereby promoting sustainability. Thirdly, the implementation of the programme through mass organizations, such as the Lao Women's Union, was an effective approach to reaching the community.

12. The Lao People's Democratic Republic does not have an official population policy though some basic principles and elements of a population programme and strategy are contained in its Constitution, in political reports to the Fifth and Sixth Party Congresses and in the Five-Year Development Plan. There is a political commitment that population growth should correspond with economic growth. The experience gained in this area reveals the need to assign a high priority to advocacy activities and the importance of developing a mechanism that will promote population concerns in the country.

13. Overall, the Fund's experiences have been positive in terms of raising public awareness and publicizing the importance of population and development issues. The shortage of trained staff along with inadequate infrastructure facilities to provide health and birth-spacing services continue to remain serious concerns that will be addressed during the second country programme. In addition, the shortage of contraceptives to meet the high level of unmet demand is another crucial area that will receive UNFPA support.

Other external assistance

14. Some United Nations agencies, bilateral donors and NGOs are providing support to various health and social development projects. UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO) are providing support for capacity- building, district health system development, women's empowerment, and improving primary health care services. UNDP is supporting infrastructure and human resource development and AIDS prevention and education.

15. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has supported such primary health care activities as the construction of health centres and furnishing medical equipment and supplies. The World Bank

is providing assistance for the construction of health centres, provision of medical equipment and supplies, and for training health staff. The Japanese and Swedish Governments and the German Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) are also assisting primary health care programmes, including for the prevention of HIV/AIDS. Australia has supported a maternal and child health project in one province.

16. Among international NGOs, the Japanese Organization for International Cooperation in Family Planning (JOICFP) is supporting primary health care activities. The Save the Children Fund (SCF) of Australia is assisting in manpower development to improve maternal and child health. SCF (United Kingdom) is providing assistance to human resource development, training and equipment. Care International has supported an information, education and communication (IEC) project to identify risk behaviours among some disadvantaged groups.

17. UNFPA is the lead funding agency in the population sector in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. UNFPA's assistance to population and the birth-spacing programme is crucial since no other major source of assistance is available in this area. The Fund has gained strong credibility among other donors because of its close working links with the Government and mass organizations at the community level. It is in a unique position to assist the Government in moving towards the full integration of population concerns into the national development plan.

Proposed programme

18. The goals of the Lao People's Democratic Republic's Five-Year Development Plan are to maintain the population growth rate at 2.4 per cent and to reduce the infant mortality rate to 73 per 1,000 and maternal mortality to 225 per 100,000 live births by the year 2000. UNFPA's proposed programme will focus on assisting the Government in achieving its goals through strengthening reproductive health services, building institutional capacity at all levels and supporting advocacy efforts to promote population programmes. The Fund will also assist the Government in coordinating donor activities in the population field.

19. Sub-programme planning will focus on the three core areas of reproductive health, including family planning and sexual health; population and development strategies; and advocacy. To ensure consistency and complementarity the three core areas will be addressed simultaneously in order to reinforce each other. For instance, advocacy will play a key role in reproductive health by creating awareness on the importance of birth spacing for reducing maternal mortality as well as empowering youth to help combat major reproductive health problems like sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including HIV/AIDS. Population and development strategies will also be coordinated with reproductive health programme planning through research and analysis into specific reproductive health issues (e.g., maternal mortality, unsafe abortion and gender disparities).

20. Reproductive health. Within the reproductive health area, the proposed programme will assist the Government in providing access to reproductive health services to 80 per cent of the population. The programme will address the issue of unmet need for such services, including birth spacing, by supporting a gradual expansion of quality reproductive health services in 103 districts as part of the primary health care programme. The referral system will be developed by using the district as a focal point to coordinate reproductive health care services, including those addressing STDs and the management of complications due to induced abortion. These activities should contribute towards reducing maternal mortality. UNFPA will also provide assistance for birth-spacing services to disadvantaged groups and adolescents.

21. In order to strengthen the institutional capacity of the major national agencies involved in the population and reproductive health fields, UNFPA will provide technical support for training staff in various ministries, institutes and mass organizations, such as the Ministry of Health, the Institute for Maternal and Child Health, Institute of Economic Research, State Planning Committee, the National Statistical Centre, and the Lao Women's Union. Technical assistance will also be provided to these institutes to help them conduct research studies and to analyse, disseminate and utilize their findings on population and reproductive health.

22. To increase awareness, knowledge and understanding among the general population on emerging sexual and health issues (such as STDs and HIV/AIDS), UNFPA will assist in developing appropriate, culturally acceptable IEC materials and strategies for specific groups such as ethnic populations, adolescents, and potential birth-spacing acceptors, focusing especially on male responsibility. Also, in collaboration with the National Commission for the Control of AIDS and with UNAIDS, UNFPA will assist in the formulation of a national strategic plan for the prevention of STDs, including HIV/AIDS, and help develop appropriate IEC strategies and train health officials in methods of control and prevention of STDs.

23. UNFPA will assist the Lao Youth Union to play an advocacy role through an appropriate IEC campaign and training in preventing HIV and STDs to out-of-school youth through the non-formal education system. For in-school youth, UNFPA will continue to support the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, in promoting population education within the formal education system.

24. Population and development strategies. The proposed programme will assist the Government in formulating and integrating population and gender issues into the national development plan. UNFPA will provide technical assistance to various ministries and institutions in order to overcome the shortage of national expertise and to strengthen existing capacities to undertake research and data collection as well as to analyse and utilize the results. Research areas that will receive UNFPA support include the specific reproductive health needs of adolescents and disadvantaged groups,

gender disparities and maternal mortality. Training in research and data collection will focus on activities that emphasize disaggregation by gender.

25. Advocacy. In view of the importance of population issues in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, UNFPA will assist the Government in establishing a national mechanism to promote population programmes and to play an advocacy role on population and development planning. This will include support to the Government in promoting reproductive health education, including on birth spacing and sexual health, by initiating a series of high-level national seminars and discussion groups reflective of the ICPD Programme of Action. The Fund will also support student forums and other means for popular participation to enable the public to understand population and development issues. UNFPA support will focus especially on enhancing the technical capabilities of service providers, who are often agents for change, to undertake various advocacy actions in their own regular activities and programmes.

26. In order to promote gender equality and equity, the Fund will support the Lao Women's Union in improving managerial capacities at central, provincial and district levels. The Lao Women's Union will be a focal point for advocacy efforts directed towards empowering women. The Lao Women's Union has the authority to make policy- and programme-level recommendations for reducing gender disparities within sectoral ministries' planning and policies. To reduce gender disparity in education, UNFPA will support advocacy efforts aimed at encouraging girl-child education as well as encouraging male participation and responsibility in birth-spacing programmes.

Implementation, monitoring, evaluation and coordination

27. The proposed programme will be executed and implemented by the Government and national and international NGOs and will call upon United Nations organizations and specialized agencies for their technical support. UNFPA execution will be concentrated in the area of procurement, especially for the reproductive health programme. The Ministry of Health will implement activities in the area of reproductive health to be assisted by other sectoral ministries. The State Planning Committee will be the implementing agency for the population policies and development strategies theme area. The Lao Women's Union, Youth Union and Ministry of Education will implement various advocacy activities. The State Planning Committee is the focal point for the coordination of population programmes in the country. Given the lack of skilled personnel in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, UNFPA will provide training in programme management, coordination, monitoring and evaluation to the staff.

28. At the start of 1999, a mid-term review will be carried out to look into the achievements or weaknesses of the programme. In line with UNFPA guidelines and following the ICPD principles, goals and threshold indicators, a combination of quantitative and qualitative indicators will be used to monitor and evaluate the second country programme. In addition, each core area will have annual

tripartite project reviews, during which the annual work plan and implementation status of the projects will be reviewed and modified, if necessary.

Recommendation

29. The Executive Director recommends that the Executive Board approve the proposed programme of assistance to the Lao People's Democratic Republic, as presented, in the amount of $6 million over the period 1997-2000, $5.2 million of which would be programmed from UNFPA's regular resources, to the extent such resources are available, and the balance of $800,000 would be sought from multi-bilateral and/or other, including regular, resources to the extent possible, consistent with Executive Board decision 96/15 on the allocation of UNFPA resources.